

Water, Falling Rising Joy

By Tom Poland



Hiking South Carolina's Waterfall Country

In much, much earlier times, when earth shifted, pushing up mountains, punching out gorges and filling riverbeds with crystalline waters, the upstate of South Carolina was very fortunate. It was then that the Blue Ridge Mountains took on the natural beauty that beckons hikers to its trails, cloaked in green and running white with rapids and waterfalls. Today her waters churn, plummet, stair step, froth and run white toward two seas as hikers trek uphill and waters freefall over ledges, each in gravity's grasp.

Waterfalls, hiking and mountains—an Upstate classic.

Watch for black bears and mountain wildflowers, and tune your ear to the sound of tinkling, crashing water, for rivulets often betray falls. Whether you're a day hiker or an overnigher, "the Great Blue Hills of God," as the Cherokee knew, them will reward you.

For instance, consider hiking the imaginary line that determines which sea the waters flow into—the Eastern Continental Divide. It courses through spectacular scenery, running southwest to northeast generally. On its north and west sides, water flows to the Gulf of Mexico, to its east and south, the Atlantic. Beneath Jones Gap

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A day afield, hiking stick in hand and backpack heavy, may prove taxing but rewarding: once you've made it to the top of your world, your reward is stunning views from atop granite pinnacles. Up here in the Upcountry, mountain breezes blow away your troubles, cool streams refresh aching feet, and nature's shower—a waterfall—sends shivers down the spine. By the time you return to your tent or cabin in state parks with names such as Devils Fork, Caesars Head, Keowee-Toxaway, and Jones Gap, you're relaxed, recharged and ready to do it again.

First timer? Grab some good shoes, rain gear, and bring along a spirit for adventure and an eye for nature.

waterfall, the waters above you head for two coasts.

The Mountain Bridge Wilderness Area alone offers trails ranging from short and easy to moderate, such as the two-mile hike to Raven Cliff Falls or the strenuous 4.3-mile trek to the rim of Jones Gap. Feel like a challenge? Ascend Sassafras Mountain. At 3,560 feet, it's the highest point in South Carolina- its "rooftop". Of course, it's not the mileage as much as elevation, steepness, terrain and conditions. Weaving along mountain flanks through thick ranks of rhododendron and mountain laurel, navigating slippery, water-splashed rocks, and descending into and out of ravines proves challenging. Be careful. Always.

Land of Falling Waters

Here in the Upcountry you'll find waterfalls beautiful to behold, each different. Ease up Highway 130 near the North Carolina line to glimpse Whitewater Falls' twin cataracts, plunging more than 400 feet downward, the SC-NC boundary running between them. This, the Eastern United State's highest vertical falls. Want to see others? Here's a partial list.

Day hike to one of the Eastern United State's highest and beautiful falls: Raven Cliff Falls, near Caesars Head, plummeting some 420 feet. Brave? Cross its swinging footbridge a la Indiana Jones style.

Falls Creek Falls drops its beauty 100 feet in two levels. Rainbow Falls plummets 80 to 100 feet over chromatic granite. Twin Falls splits Reedy Cove Creek, one falls over a granite wall, the other over boulders.

And so, here you are. You've hiked uphill for a long while but feel more alive than ever.

Falls with beautiful names live here ... Issaqueena Falls and its three stair-stepping cascades ... Laurel Fork Falls, spilling into Lake Jocassee ... Brasstown Falls, a sheer curtain of water ... Station Cove, a glittering filigree of silver ... King Creek Falls, an upside down geyser of white slashing through a green alleyway. And, yes, still others.

Where to stay? Most any place you want. Base camps for hiking and exploring waterfalls abound. There's Caesars Head State Park, Jones Gap State Park, Devils Fork, Keowee-Toxaway, and Table Rock, with its most-photographed mountain in South Carolina and excellent network of trails.

And so, here you are. You've hiked uphill for a long while but feel more alive than ever. Hemlock and spruce spice the air, and birds flit through boughs like sprites. Ahead a roar, understated but growing ... a few more turns and the air thunders and shakes and mists chill the wind. Then you see it: a majestic drapery of water pounding a bed of granite. The classic unmovable object and the irresistible force, and you behold it. In the Upcountry.

Find out more...

For a SC Waterfalls brochure, please call
1-800-862-1795 or 1-800-849-4766.

